



REGIONAL HIGHLIGHTS

MOROCCO • ALGERIA • TUNISIA • EGYPT • LEBANON

Business Women's Summit

Accomplished entrepreneurs, economic leaders gather in Tunis

The first ever Business Women's Summit for the Middle East and North Africa drew more than 200 women from 15 countries in the region, plus the West Bank and Gaza, for three days of intensive discussions, training sessions, and networking.

"This is the first time we've been able to bring women from the entire Arab world together, from the Gulf countries to the Maghreb," a participant from Bahrain said of the event, held May 24-26 in Tunis, Tunisia, and sponsored by MEPI.

The Summit was co-hosted by a MEPI grantee, the Beyster Institute of the University of California, San Diego, and by Women Entrepreneurs, Inc. MEPI received considerable assistance from the U.S. Embassy in Tunis and from AMIDEAST, which hosted a related conference May 22-23 in Tunis for women from the region who had earlier participated in the first MEPI-sponsored Business Internship Program [see Page 4].

Many of the participants invited to the Summit had taken part in

previous MEPI-sponsored events, either in the United States or across the region. Most importantly, these women were selected for their personal achievements and pioneering steps in the business world. The attendees represented a wide array of businesses,



An expert panel addresses participants at the Business Women's Summit.

from lawyers and retail managers, to high tech experts, oil executives, and a chocolate manufacturer.

One participant from Morocco noted that this was a particularly useful gathering and a refreshing change from similar events held in the past. "The choice of women at this conference was independent of Arab governments," she said.

In addition to sharing business experiences and tips for success, the women participated in a series of workshops and panel discussions. These focused on such topics as building personal leadership skills, raising capital, becoming an entrepreneur, and creating a regional businesswomen's coalition, which several of the participants agreed to launch at the close of the Summit.

A U.S. delegation was led by Under Secretary of State for Global Affairs Paula Dobriansky, Assistant Secretary of State for Education and Cultural Affairs Patricia Harrison, and Vice Chair of the Export-Import Bank April Foley.

Under Secretary Dobriansky captured the essence of the Summit and the reason for which MEPI brought together these present and future business leaders. "We hope to give you the practical skills you need to advance your business careers," she said during her keynote address, "and use this conference to encourage your leadership as agents for change."

NEWS

Lebanon's Historic Elections Spark Democratic Change

In May-June 2005, Lebanese citizens took historic steps by exercising their right to vote for a new government in the first elections in 30 years held without Syrian troops in the country.

"The new Lebanon is one that is democratic," U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice said during her July visit to Beirut, days after the new government was formed. "It is a Lebanon in which Lebanese should make decisions for the Lebanese."

In support of the elections, MEPI undertook several democratic reform initiatives. Working through the National Democratic Institute (NDI) and its local partners, MEPI supported the training of more than 500 domestic monitors for the four rounds of parliamentary elections.

MEPI also launched a nationwide voter education campaign through NDI and its local network and trained dozens of women candidates through an NDI women's leadership program.

Other MEPI activities in support of the elections included monitoring print and broadcast media, conducting public opinion polling, and training journalists to cover the elections. MEPI's implementing partners, in addition to NDI, included Freedom House, Internews, and local organizations.

From the Director

Peter Mulrean, MEPI RO, Tunis



As you can see from this issue of the *Regional Highlights* newsletter, MEPI has been engaged in a wide range of reform-oriented activities during the past several months.

These have included bringing dynamic businesswomen together in Tunis, while supporting democratic elections in Lebanon [Page 1], among a host of other programs.

Looking back over the four months since the inaugural edition of this newsletter in May, we have made many important strides working together with local and American partners. Highlights include training journalists from several Arab countries, promoting free trade agreements, pushing education reforms in impoverished areas,

and publishing a seminal report on the state of women's rights [Page 2].

Looking ahead, our direct engagement with reformers from across the region will be a primary focus. At the grassroots level, we are putting in place a program to increase strategic planning by local NGOs [Page 3]. At the macro level, MEPI is supporting the Broader Middle East and North Africa (BMENA) initiative to help governments, civil society, and businesses build a common reform agenda [Page 4].

MEPI bids fond farewell to Alina Romanowski, who has become Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Education and Cultural Affairs, and welcomes our new Washington Director Tammy Wincup, who brings broad experience and boundless energy to her new responsibilities.

Inside this issue:

Looking Back

2

Summer Highlights

2

Looking Now

3

Strategic Planning

3

Looking Forward

4

Forum for the Future

4

Looking Back

The following information provides a snapshot of successful programs selected from each of MEPI's four pillars for reform:

Democracy

Internews Trains Media to Improve Election Reporting

Against the backdrop of Lebanon's parliamentary elections, and with support from MEPI, the U.S.-based nongovernmental organization (NGO) Internews held a workshop from May 30-June 1 in Beirut focused on "Journalism Skills in Covering Parliamentary Elections."

This event attracted three journalists from each of five countries, including **Algeria, Bahrain, Lebanon, Morocco, and Tunisia**. The workshop was part of the Internews Beirut project called "An Initiative for Open and Pluralistic Media in Five Arabic-Speaking Countries," which receives funding from MEPI.

Veteran trainers from Internews gave expert advice on journalism techniques, encouraged participants to share ideas from their experiences working in their own media environments, and discussed the most effective ways to report on elections issues.

Participants agreed that holding the workshop in Lebanon during the elections enhanced the learning experience. For more information, visit www.internews.org.

Economics

MEPI Supports Free Trade Agreements in North Africa

The Tunisian-American Chamber of Commerce (TACC) held a MEPI-funded conference in June designed to spark debate about the advantages of signing a Free Trade Agreement (FTA) with the United States. The event drew more than 100 participants from **Algeria, Jordan, Libya, Morocco, and Tunisia**, including the Tunisian Minister of Commerce, other government officials, and businessmen.

U.S. Ambassador William Hudson delivered a strong opening address, stressing the interconnection between economic and political reforms. Other speakers discussed the benefits of removing tariffs, opening sectors to U.S. investment, and increasing transparency laws.

The Tunisian Minister of Commerce said that an FTA with the United States would help create 80,000 new jobs a year and thousands of companies in Tunisia over the next five years.

Education



Teachers talk about MEPI to Moroccan students.

NEF Helps Keep Kids in School

As part of its MEPI-funded project, the Near East Foundation (NEF) took the opportunity of the National Day of Child's Rights to further promote education reform efforts in the High Atlas Mountains region of **Morocco**.

The project aims to increase and maintain the attendance of schoolchildren in this impoverished portion of the country, where adult illiteracy rates are nearly 100 percent. Launched in January 2005, the project, titled "Community Involvement in Reforming Primary Education," has led to increasing enrollment and retention of students, especially girls.

For the National Child's Day celebrations, NEF organized a activities from May 24-31 that involved a wide range of participants. For more information, visit www.neareast.org.

Women

Freedom House Releases Key Report on Women's Rights

A MEPI grant has enabled Freedom House to complete and distribute widely a comprehensive survey detailing many of the barriers hindering women throughout the Middle East and North Africa from fully participating in their societies.

This report, titled "Women's Rights in the Middle East and North Africa: Citizenship and Justice," was released May 20 as the first-ever comparative assessment of the status of women in the region. The survey revealed a substantial deficit in women's rights throughout the 16 countries and Palestinian territories where it was conducted.

It also noted important country differences, as well as some key breakthroughs that have taken place in gender equality, in legal rights, and in increased access to education for women and girls over the past several years.

The report was a culmination of an intensive 20-month-long research process by a team of 40 leading scholars, analysts, and women's rights experts, most of them originating from the region studied.

The research team discovered that in most countries women are at a profound disadvantage in practically every institution of society, such as the criminal justice system, the economy, education, health care, and the media. Discriminatory laws and inadequate enforcement of existing laws intended to guarantee equality and fair treatment exacerbate the systematic gender gap.

The drafters of this report hope it will serve as a catalyst for both regional and international efforts to empower women in the region. For more information, and to access the report, please visit the Freedom House website at www.freedomhouse.org.

Summer Highlights

May					
3	Internews conducted a training workshop in Tunisia on "On-line Reporting and Ethics" to coincide with World Press Freedom Day	23-25	U.S. Labor and Trade officials joined the Government of Morocco to host a "North Africa-Middle East Labor Dialogue"	4-12	The ABA organized focus groups in Morocco to gauge public perception of the judiciary and build confidence in the legal system
6	Aid To Artisans launched a Nomadic Caravan in Morocco , helping rural producers from remote regions market their crafts	23-25	Government, civil society, and private sector representatives from 30 countries participated in the first Broader Middle East and North Africa (BMENA) education ministerial, held in Jordan	11-15	As part of MEPI's Partnership for Financial Excellence, CLDP held a bankruptcy workshop in Algeria attended by 17 judges
6-7	The American Bar Association (ABA) joined two Moroccan women's rights organizations to convene a training program for women legal professionals	22-23	AMIDEAST hosted the Business Internship Program alumnae conference in Tunisia [Page 1, 4]	16-18	ABA organized the first Arab Women's Legal Network meeting in Jordan , attended by 80 legal professionals from 15 countries
17-19	Catholic Relief Services held a workshop in southern Morocco on democratic participation and effective local government for 27 members of village associations	24-26	First Business Women's Summit held in Tunisia [Page 1]	20-21	Democracy Assistance Dialogue (DAD) on women's participation in public life held in Turkey
22	The Center for Development and Research held a workshop in Lebanon to provide training in democracy, election procedures, and civic participation for students	30	Tanmia began a week of Internet training sessions for 67 civil society organizations Morocco	23	Internews led a MEPI-funded U.S. study tour for Algerian technology experts, as part of its Internet Policy Reform Project
June					
		6-10	Commercial Law Development Program (CLDP) organized consultations in the United States for a Moroccan delegation	July	
				2-16	Lebanese teachers visited the U.S. to work with American Federation of Teachers experts
			August		
			4-7	National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL) held a seminar in Rabat, Morocco , for 40 parliamentary staff to improve research and communications	
			6-18	Center for Development and Population Activities (CEDPA) held a grant training workshop in Alexandria, Egypt , for 26 women	
			17-22	The National Democratic Institute (NDI) and the Algerian Center of Information and Documentation on Rights of Children and Women (CIDEF) co-hosted a leadership workshop for 50 women, members of Algerian political parties	
			7	Tunisian students and faculty members from the Tunisian Journalism School (IPSI) completed a workshop begun July 15 at Bowling Green State University as part of the University Linkage program	

Looking Now

The following are highlights from some of the ongoing programs in the five countries covered by the MEPI Regional Office:

Morocco

- **Catholic Relief Services** is encouraging village associations to create unions as part of an ongoing project to help citizens outline their development priorities in coordination with locally-elected officials.
- To promote reading, thinking, and analytical skills in young readers, MEPI has extended "My Arabic Library" to Morocco, working with **Scholastic International**, the world's largest publisher and distributor of children's books.
- **State University of New York's Center for International Development** is implementing a three-year project for members of parliament to help strengthen committees, develop budget expertise, and promote advocacy efforts.
- **Hellen Keller International** has partnered with two Moroccan associations to give neighborhood women in Tangiers a chance to increase their livelihood through literacy classes and basic skills training.
- **The Moroccan-American Chamber of Commerce (AmCham)** is using a second MEPI small grant to continue developing and maintaining a website it designed to provide information in support of the U.S.-Moroccan Free Trade Agreement.

Algeria

- **Commercial Law Development Program (CLDP)** continues to provide technical assistance to support Algeria's efforts to accede to the World Trade Organization, while a separate project aims to build the capacity of Algerian judges to adjudicate cases and disputes arising under commercial law.
- **Internews** received favorable mention in one of Algeria's most influential daily newspapers for its ongoing work on the MEPI-funded Global Internet Policy Initiative (GIPI), designed to assist the development of new information and communication technologies in the country.

Tunisia

- **The International Republican Institute (IRI)** is holding a September conference in Tunis on public opinion polling for members of registered political parties, party research units, and polling experts.
- **The National Conference of State Legislators (NCSL)** is conducting programs for parliamentary staff members on research tools and techniques, communication strategies, and other topics.
- **CLDP** provides technical assistance centered on the U.S. Middle East Free Trade Area (MEFTA) initiative, including capacity building for technology management and intellectual property rights issues.

Egypt

- As part of its broader programming throughout the region, **Arab Civitas** is running a civic education program, including the development of a project in the district of Quab to help solve its "dropout" issue by working with school administrators to reduce fees and provide free tutoring for students in need.
- **The Center for Development and Population Activity (CEDPA)** is partnering with the **National Council of Women (NCW)** to conduct programs for grassroots women's organizations in four governorates, with the goal of enhancing the capacity of rural women in the decision-making process.
- **New Horizon Association for Social Development (NHASD)** is working with youth in Old Cairo to equip them with the civic education, leadership, and advocacy skills to affect change in their local communities, through training, followed by the design and implementation of small advocacy projects.
- **Financial Services Volunteer Corps (FSVC)** has been working with the Central Bank of Egypt and the U.S. Federal Reserve Board on developing a structure to help formulate and design the implementation of a new Egyptian monetary policy.

Lebanon

- **The Lebanese Transparency Association (LTA)** and the **Lebanese Center for Political Studies (LCPS)** are holding a series of workshops on electoral law reform from the perspective of enhancing accountability and transparency. Three roundtables have been organized on election monitoring, transparency in the campaign-ing process, and elections as an accountability mechanism.
- **YMCA Lebanon** is developing knowledgeable, transparent, and accountable leadership among youth and women, and strengthening cooperation between civil society organizations, the media, and the parliament. This project promotes democracy education and awareness for the need for political reform through journalist training sessions, awareness campaigns, university lectures, public policy workshops, national issue fora, and other integrated activities.
- **The Center for International Private Enterprise (CIPE)** is funding the strengthening of corporate governance efforts to promote transparency, rule of law, and protection of share-holders' rights in Lebanon, Jordan, Morocco, and Egypt, in addition to organizing a series of conferences and workshops focused on improving corporate governance.



Field testing of the Strategic Planning Workshop in Cairo in August stressed networking and organizational skills.

Programming Opportunity

MEPI Reaches Out to Local Groups

In August, the MEPI Regional Office in Tunis finalized plans to launch a new program called "Strategic Planning Workshops for Local Organizations."

This series of two-day training workshops targets civil society organizations and other groups. It begins in September and will be conducted in Egypt, Tunisia, Morocco, and Algeria [see chart].

The workshops are being conducted in Arabic and French by MEPI partner the Egyptian NGO Support Center (for more information, please visit www.egyptngosupport.org.) The training workshops will focus on organizational strategic planning,

capacity-building skills, and awareness of ways that individuals and groups can apply for outside funding.

Strategic planning is a responsive way to address the needs many organizations face in acquiring essential planning skills. These field-tested workshops provide training in the basic skills necessary to conduct organizational strategic planning.

U.S. Embassies in the three countries invite applications from interested local organizations, including but not limited to NGOs, unions, and media outlets.

As there are limited places

STRATEGIC PLANNING WORKSHOP September Events

Egypt: Cairo	17-18
Tunisia: Tunis	20-21
Morocco: Casablanca	24-25
Algeria: Algiers	27-28

available for each workshop, priority is given to those local organizations whose missions and ongoing activities target the MEPI priorities of political openness, quality education, women's empowerment, and economic reform. (To learn more about

MEPI's four reform pillars, please visit the MEPI website at www.mepi.state.gov.)

These workshops developed as a result of MEPI and U.S. Embassies in the region cooperating with a variety of local organizations during the past year. It became evident that many groups are sincere about driving reform efforts, yet often face challenges adequately meeting their objectives or sufficiently raising funds to cover their operating costs.

The tailored workshops seek to increase local capacity to participate in the reform process through the acquisition of strategic planning and analytical thinking skills.



Looking Forward

Forum for the Future

Second International Gathering Scheduled for November

The second Forum for the Future, scheduled for November in Bahrain, is expected to draw government officials and civil society advocates representing countries from Morocco to Afghanistan, as well as leaders from the Group of Eight (G-8) industrialized nations.

"Working with our G-8 partners, the United States has created the Broader Middle East and North Africa (BMENA) initiative to build partnerships with people in the region who are working for greater liberty," said U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice. "The flagship of this bold new policy is the Forum for the Future, an unprecedented inter-national venue

to amplify the voices of reform that are redefining the region."

The first historic Forum for the Future was held in Morocco in December. The initiative was envisioned by President Bush and the other G-8 leaders at the Sea Island Summit in June 2004 as a multilateral effort to support calls for reform originating from governments, civil society, business leaders, and citizens throughout the Middle East and North Africa.

These calls are embodied in declarations such as the Tunis Arab League Summit Declaration, the Istanbul "Platform for Democratic Governance in the Islamic World," the Alexan-

dria Statement "Issues of Reform in the Arab World," the United Nations Arab Human Development Reports, and the Aqaba statement of Arab business leaders.

The second Forum for the Future will be co-hosted by the Governments of Bahrain and the United Kingdom, as the G-8 President. MEPI and the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) have been supporting several efforts associated with the Forum and other BMENA initiatives.

For more information, see the Department of State website at www.usinfo.state.gov.

Funding Opportunity:

Providing Small Grants to NGOs for Democratic Reform Initiatives

MEPI's Regional Office in Tunis recently completed financing another round of funding for the small grants program run out of the U.S. Embassies in the region, and is accepting applications again.

Recent recipients included a local NGO training Egyptian youth to better understand democracy, an Algerian film director producing a documentary about the role of women in society, and chambers of commerce in Morocco and Tunisia working to promote free trade.

The MEPI Small Grants program supports local capacity for reform in one of MEPI's four program areas: democracy and civil society, women's empowerment, access to quality education, and economic reform and job growth. Grants are available for local organizations only, and amounts usually range from \$10,000-25,000.

During the past year, the Regional Office in Tunisia funded 18 small grants in Algeria, Egypt, Lebanon, Morocco, and Tunis across each of the four reform areas. For more information about the small grants program, including how to apply for funding, contact the U.S. Embassy in your country, or visit the MEPI website at www.mepi.state.gov.

Project Opportunity:

Helping Arab Businesswomen Profit from Economic Internships

Based on the success of last year's first U.S. Business Internship Program for Young Middle Eastern Women (BIP), in which more than 40 women from the Middle East and North Africa spent three months working at companies and law firms in the United States, MEPI is pleased to announce the second BIP, which begins in November.

Co-sponsored by the Educational and Cultural Affairs Bureau, the program is designed to provide participants, ages 22-32, with unique opportunities to learn management and business skills while working in the dynamic American business environment. The America-Mideast Educational and Training Services, Inc. (AMIDEAST) administers recruitment and selection of participants.

Participants will spend one month studying U.S. business culture and practice at either Goizueta Business School at Emory University in Atlanta, or Fuqua School of Business at Duke University in Durham, North Carolina. Following the academic work, they will be placed for three months with U.S. companies and law firms in major cities across the United States. For more information, visit www.amideast.org.

Calendar of Upcoming Events

September

Strategic Planning Workshops for Local Organizations, to be implemented by the Egyptian NGO Support Center, in Cairo, Casablanca, and Algiers **(Sept. 17-28— see Page 3 for details)**

American Bar Association (ABA) Morocco Judicial Program Training of the Trainers Workshops for Judge Trainees **(Sept. 19)**

Overseas Private Investment Corporation (OPIC) Regional Conference on Expanding Horizons in North Africa, Marrakech, Morocco **(Sept. 20-22)**

Women's Regional Campaign School, Kuwait City, Kuwait **(Sept. 24-29)**

Commercial Law Development Program (CLDP) seminar on "Technology Transfer from Academia to Small Businesses," Tunis, Tunisia **(Sept. 23)**

October

CLDP seminar on Equity Financing for Technology Start-Ups, Algiers, Algeria **(Oct. 1-5)**

Democracy Assistance Dialogue (DAD) joint government-civil society meeting on political participation and elections, Rabat, Morocco **(early October)**

CLDP seminar on "Judicial Reorganization of Small- to Medium Enterprises (SMEs) Experiencing Temporary Difficulties," Tunis **(dates to come)**

November

Second BMENA Forum for the Future to be held in Bahrain **(see above for details)**

Partnership for Financial Excellence Regulators' Course on Anti-Money Laundering, Beirut, Lebanon **(Nov. 27-Dec. 1)**

CLDP seminar on "Adjudicating Disputes Related to Letters of Credit and to International Contracts," Algiers, Algeria **(Nov. 19-23)**

CLDP seminar on "Generalized System of Preference (GSP)," Algiers, Algeria **(dates to be determined)**

Partnership for Financial Excellence Regulators' Training Course on Problem Bank Supervision, conducted by the U.S. Office of the Comptroller of the Currency, Cairo, Egypt **(Nov. 13-17)**

December

CLDP seminar on "Entrepreneurship, Innovation and Economic Development," Tunis **(Dec. 13-15)**

CLDP seminar on "Second-Stage Equity Financing for Technology SMEs," Algiers **(dates to be determined)**

MEPI Regional Highlights Newsletter is written and produced by the Middle East Partnership Initiative (MEPI) Regional Office at the U.S. Embassy in Tunis, Tunisia. We welcome your comments and suggestions. Please feel free to contact us by e-mail, phone, or fax:

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